

Testimony of

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for asking me to speak to this committee today about this important issue.

#### The Problem

It is common knowledge that animal species are endangered across the world, and most of the time what people attribute the problem to is loss of habitat, human population growth, and human-animal conflict.

But what people really do not know as much about is that animal species are also threatened by the bounty on their head. Wildlife trafficking – the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products – is a huge black market industry. And organized crime may be right at the center of it.

In some cases, wildlife trafficking is posing an even greater threat to wildlife than the loss of their natural habitat.

And the numbers are staggering. Interpol estimates that the conservative estimate is that the illicit wildlife trade amounts to about \$10 billion a year globally and may reach as high as \$20 billion.

The estimates on the trade in live animals are disturbing. For example, an estimated 25,000-40,000 primates alone are traded per year, some for pets, some for so called “bushmeat”. Two to three million birds – live birds – are for sale per year.

And the statistics on wildlife products are even grimmer. Hundreds of thousands of wildlife parts are sold each year solely for medicinal use, mostly for traditional Chinese medicines. And the reason the trade has reached these massive quantities is that it has become very profitable.

Wildlife trafficking is often linked to other forms of organized crime, including the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and people.

Research shows that smugglers of contraband tend to use the same routes and methods, regardless of the items smuggled. International organized crime is increasingly attracted to wildlife trafficking. There are huge profits to be made with little risk. Drug and wildlife traffickers often use the same routes and have even used illegally taken animals to carry concealed narcotics.

In May of 2006, customs officials in Hong Kong found five tons of ivory hidden behind a false wall in the bottom of a metal shipping crate. When the Cameroon-based crate was first opened, it appeared to contain a shipment of plywood. The false wall was discovered when the crate was loaded onto the back of a truck and driven through a giant X-ray machine. Traces of drugs were found inside the hidden compartment, suggesting that the crate had also been used to ship at least two kinds of contraband.

### Threats to Human Health

Wildlife trafficking also poses health threats, as some diseases, such as avian influenza, SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), Ebola virus and tuberculosis, can cross species lines and be transferred from animals to humans, endangering public health.

They spread among humans quite quickly, and they're also quite deadly. But we see from the illegal trade that there's already some potential for moving the avian influenza virus.

In October 2004, a Thai man was caught attempting to smuggle a couple of mountain hawk eagles that were infected with the H5N1 virus. He had them in his carry-on bags in Brussels. They were seized and euthanized.

In 2005 in London, two parrots were seized at Heathrow airport that were infected with the avian influenza virus. So this is a real threat that we need to pay attention to.

Smuggling of avian influenza infected chicks from China has been implicated in the spread of avian influenza to Nigeria.

According to Timothy E. Moore, director of federal projects at the National Agricultural Biosecurity Center at Kansas State University and a nationally recognized expert in homeland security:

"No one knows the real numbers, but they are large. Behind illegal drug traffic, illegal animals are No. 2, and there is no doubt in my mind that this will play a prominent role in the spread of this disease. It looks to be the main way it [avian influenza] is spreading in some parts of the world, along with the migration of wild birds."

It's going to take a major effort to crack down on illegal wildlife trafficking. And we recognize that it's going to require not only the efforts of governments, but also of nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and the average American citizen.

And, given the challenges we face and the fact that those challenges are not limited by national borders, we're going to be increasingly reliant on these partnerships in the future.

The high profits for illegal wildlife products combined with the low risk of prosecution are driving larger members of organized crime syndicates to engage in this black market. And as more enter the illegal trade, more species are brought to the brink of extinction.

I'll cite a few examples.

### Tigers

The tiger population at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century worldwide was estimated at 100,000 animals. Today the wild tiger population is around 5,000 animals. That is a 95% population decline, with most of that occurring in the last 25 years. India has seen its population of 3,508 tigers in 1997 drop to 1,411 in 2007. That represents a 60% reduction in just ten years. Tigers will not survive in the wild at this rate.

There is a relentless demand for tigers' skins and body parts. Tiger populations are plummeting and at the same time the price for the products and the tigers themselves are increasing.

A tiger skin is worth \$16,000 in China and up to \$50,000 on the international black market.

A pound of tiger glue made from tiger bones sells for \$2,000 in Vietnam. Tiger bone wine --yes wine--sells from \$40 to over \$100 depending on the vintage.

As a top predator, this species plays a keystone role in the ecosystems it inhabits. For example, without tigers, deer populations increase; more deer means more grazing on vegetation and in many cases, overgrazing occurs, altering the overall vegetation in an ecosystem. Given that the tiger is listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act, which means it is in danger of extinction, poaching should not be tolerated.

### Sharks

Many species of sharks are particularly susceptible to overexploitation because they are typically long-lived, slow-growing, and produce few offspring. Over 25 percent of all chondrichthyan species evaluated for the IUCN Red List of Threaten Species have been assessed as Threatened with some populations declining by 90 percent. NOAA

While sharks are harvested for a variety of products fins are the most economically valuable shark product. Extrapolating from data in Hong Kong (the world's largest trading center for fins), studies estimate that approximately 40 million sharks are represented in the global shark fin trade each year (22d meeting of the CITES Animals Committee). The value of the global trade in shark fins is estimated at 400-550 million dollars, and is expected to grow, unless constrained by limits on supply.

While some of this fin trade may be legal – if the fins are harvested in accordance with national regulations, such as in the United States, or with the various finning bans adopted by regional fisheries management organizations –it is difficult to discern how much of it may be illegal.

### Coral Reefs

Coral reefs are the rainforests of the sea. They provide food, recreation, livelihood and employment to over a billion people worldwide. They are home to more species of sea life than any other marine ecosystem.

But coral reefs are in serious decline globally. An estimated 20 percent have already been destroyed with little hope of recovery, and 50 percent is threatened with collapse.

Reefs face varied and complex threats, from land-based sources of pollution to unsustainable fishing practices, such as the use of dynamite and cyanide. But one of the main threats is over-exploitation, exacerbated by the often illegal trade in coral reef resources, including tropical fish for the live reef food fish trade and home aquaria and the corals themselves for jewelry and curios.

Sea turtles, a favorite inhabitant of coral reefs, are often illegally traded, the shells used for jewelry and combs. The price of coral jewelry can range from a few dollars for simply strung bracelets at a beachfront stand to thousands of dollars for red coral necklaces set with precious stones and gold. The same is true for turtle shell items: a bangle may cost \$5 on the beach while a carving from the whole shell can run \$10,000.

Even though many coral species are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the demand for these items is fueling the illicit coral trade in both corals and those species who depend on coral reefs for their food and shelter.

### Elephants

Although elephant populations overall in Africa are increasing, in large part due to increased wildlife law enforcement, elephants remain the target of poachers.

Economic growth in Asia has helped revitalize the illegal trade.

The rising demand for ivory has driven the price from \$200 per kilo in 2005 to more than \$700 per kilo this year.

In just two weeks in January 2008, Namibian officials seized 13 elephant tusks, totaling nearly 200 kg of ivory, and representing seven dead elephants. In the same period, Kenyan officials seized some 80 kg of raw and worked ivory at the international airport in Nairobi. Further south in Zimbabwe, police arrested 11 suspected poachers, who are believed to have killed 15 elephants within two weeks in Hwange National Park.

### United States Government Response

To help respond to this discouraging situation, the United States launched a global initiative to fight illegal wildlife trafficking – the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking. We formed CAWT with five partners from the private sector in 2005.

We launched the Coalition internationally in February, 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya. Today, we have 19 partners, including Australia, Canada, Chile, India and the United Kingdom and 13 international non-governmental organizations dedicated to combating the illegal trade in wildlife.

Through CAWT, we seek, at the highest political levels, to end the trade by curbing both the supply and demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products. We are educating consumers. We are creating new international networks for effective law enforcement.

### Improving Wildlife Law Enforcement

CAWT complements and reinforces the goals and efforts of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna, or CITES, which are focused on monitoring and regulating the trade in CITES-listed species.

While CAWT can help countries meet their obligations under CITES, it is also focused on improving the enforcement of wildlife laws in other countries, building regional enforcement networks to stop cross border trade, and strengthening prosecution capacity.

The Coalition is helping to strengthen countries' capacity to monitor and regulate the trade in species that are protected under CITES, as well as trade in animals and plants that are protected by national laws in the country of origin. A significant portion of the illegal wildlife trade involves species exported in contravention to a country's laws.

As one way to improve enforcement, the Coalition has assisted the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asia Nations) countries in establishing a new regional wildlife enforcement network, ASEAN WEN. The United States, along with WildAid (now Wildlife Alliance) and TRAFFIC International, supported the ASEAN countries in their efforts to establish the enforcement network in December of 2005.

ASEAN-WEN, which formalizes information and expertise-sharing among the ASEAN countries, for the first time provides the mechanism for law enforcement and customs agencies to cooperate with each other across national boundaries to combat wildlife crime. ASEAN-WEN, in its brief existence, has already produced a string of impressive successes in the fight against trafficking.

In one of the enforcement network's first cooperative efforts, the governments of Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia successfully returned to Indonesia 48 orangutans that had been smuggled into Thailand from their native habitat.

Two years ago, Thai officials, acting on information through ASEAN-WEN, intercepted 1,455 endangered animals believed to be destined for the pet trade. Officials said all were imported animals and estimated the value of the seizure to be \$22,850.

In June 2006, six hundred and thirty Asian Softshell Turtles from Indonesia were confiscated by the authorities at the Jurong Fishing Port in Singapore. The turtles, worth approximately SGD 50,000, had arrived by boat from the Port of Tembilahan, Riau, in Sumatra, Indonesia. Twenty five were dead on arrival, and the remaining individuals were repatriated.

After receiving a tip from the Malaysian government, Thai authorities intercepted sixty crates originating in Penang, Malaysia en route to Laos filled with hundreds of illegally traded animals, including 245 Malaysian pangolins.

Representatives from five different agencies in Thailand acted in concert to ensure the case was properly handled with their counterparts in both Malaysia and Laos. Most of the officials involved in the seizures were alumni of the USG-sponsored ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) training events.

In July of 2006, Thai authorities conducted simultaneous raids on three downtown Bangkok locations suspected of trafficking in products made from the highly endangered Tibetan Antelope. Police detained four dealers for questioning, arrested two, and confiscated over 250 purported "shatoosh" shawls, which can cost between \$1,200-\$12,000 apiece. After receiving a tip from the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), Thai officials uncovered the syndicate dealing in shatoosh, spanning at least three countries and involving multiple parties. This international ring was subsequently broken up.

In January of this year, Thai enforcement officials seized the bodies of six tigers, three leopards and two clouded leopards, as well as 275 live pangolins from Thai village near the border with Laos. Most of the big cats had been cut in half and their organs removed. The seizure was made possible due to cross border information sharing under the ASEAN-WEN umbrella, with the assistance of the ASEAN-WEN Support Program.

The countries of South Asia are working with the U.S. and Coalition partner, TRAFFIC International, to replicate the ASEAN- WEN success.

In addition to supporting ASEAN-WEN, the United States has contributed in many other ways to the protection of species all over the globe endangered by trafficking, including those I mentioned earlier.

For example, from 2005-2007, the Department of State made grants to WildAid (Wildlife Alliance) and TRAFFIC in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Department of Justice to support training of customs agents, judges, wildlife enforcement officers, and CITES authorities in the ASEAN countries.

The Department of Justice provided Prosecutor and Judge training in the Philippines, demonstrated to authorities the need for specialized capacity to deal with environmental crime, and led to the recent creation of 117 "Green Courts" in the Philippines. Department of Justice provided similar training in Indonesia last summer and has additional judiciary training workshops scheduled in Thailand and Vietnam for 2008.

Thanks to U.S. financial and technical support, the Department of Justice conducts wildlife law enforcement classes at the International Law Enforcement Academies in Botswana and Thailand. DOJ officials are also now including wildlife crimes in their classes at the International Law Enforcement Academy alongside instruction in police investigation tactics, techniques and procedures, adding wildlife crime to drugs and arms smuggling.

With State Department funding, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement provided criminal investigator training in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

In the marine area, the State Department is the initial and primary supporter of the Coral Reef Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) project, which has developed a toolkit and training manual translated into several languages to help law wildlife and coastal law enforcement officials document and prosecute crimes involving coral reefs and reef resources. Coral reef CSI has already scheduled a series of three training workshops to begin in April, in Central America, South East Asia and the Pacific Islands.

The funding for these three workshops has leveraged interest and partners for them to be duplicated in other regions with six additional workshops planned for 2008-2009 in the Red Sea, Caribbean, East Africa, South America, and South Asia, with more being discussed for 2010.

For over a decade, the United States has worked to advance strong domestic, regional, and international shark conservation and management measures in a variety of fora.

This year, at the United Nations General Assembly, the United States took the lead in calling on countries and regional fisheries management organizations to do more to protect sharks. The Resolution calls on countries to take immediate and concerted action to improve the implementation of and compliance with existing shark conservation measures, including those banning shark finning.

The United States also provides technical assistance to help other countries develop National Plans of Action for the protection and conservation of sharks, as well as shark-finning prohibitions.

We strongly support the work of the CITES Animal Committee to identify key shark species threatened by international trade and consider possibilities for additional species listings, to examine the linkages between trade in shark meat and fins, and to make species-specific recommendations to improve shark conservation and the management of international trade in shark species.

Finally, through the CAFTA-DR Environmental Cooperation Agreement with funding provided by Congress, the Department of State partnered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Humane Society International, and TRAFFIC North America to train customs agents, CITES Authorities and rescue centers in the interdiction, rehabilitation, and care of illegally traded wildlife in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

### Raising Consumer Awareness to Reduce Demand

My testimony indicates that the U.S. and CAWT are working hard worldwide to bring wildlife crime to an end and criminals to justice. I have said what we are doing to protect wildlife and end wildlife trafficking on the supply side. Curbing demand for these products is just as important. We are actively engaged on that front as well.

I wish it were as simple as it sounds. Unfortunately, we have a problem here in America. As we are among the world's most significant consumer of legally traded wildlife products, along with China, it stands to reason that we are a large market for these illegal products.

Although we know that organized crime is a significant factor, average Americans are contributing to this market too. Tourists and Internet consumers are buying huge numbers of products without knowing that what they are doing is illegal. So we're working to create public awareness here in the United States.

To focus attention on this issue, in 2006 Secretary Condoleezza Rice named actress Bo Derek Special Envoy for Wildlife Trafficking issues. Ms. Derek has traveled to San Francisco and Miami to make Americans aware of wildlife trafficking. She has also traveled overseas to draw attention to the plight of endangered animals.

We'll continue to shine a light on this tragic practice and to try to convince people that these products don't need to be brought home--that coral necklaces, shark fin soup, ivory carvings and shatoosh shawls are really things that we can live without.

As part of this effort, we filmed three public service announcements that feature renowned actor Harrison Ford. The message of the PSAs is to convince people not to buy illegally traded wildlife or wildlife products. We plan to distribute them in the United States and internationally and hope to have them placed on cruise ships and in airplane messages. We'd like to give you a preview of the PSA's today.

### Catalyzing Political Will

We will also continue to bring the illegal wildlife trafficking issue to the attention of those outside the environmental arena.

For example, last year we worked closely with German officials to include wildlife trafficking issues as part of the work of the G-8. It has also been on the agenda in U.S. summits with the EU, India, and Brazil.

We succeeded in having wildlife trafficking included in a resolution of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. We have also actively engaged international crime fighting organizations, including Interpol.

## Conclusion

Wildlife crime, like all organized crime, is a shared global problem. It affects and involves all of us, in and out of government, in one form or another. Wildlife trafficking isn't just about charismatic animals. It's about economic development and the rule of law, public health and safety, biodiversity and sustainability.

It is important not to lose sight of the effect wildlife trafficking has on human society. It lowers the economic value of legally traded goods, contributes to poverty, and encourages lawlessness.

The United States has laid a foundation to combat this insidious practice, but we have much work yet to do. We welcome the Congressional interest and active engagement in this issue.

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